

THE ROMAN MOB¹

I

IN FEBRUARY 56 B.C., PUBLIUS CLODIUS, THE PATRICIAN LEADER OF the urban proletariat at Rome, had indicted his enemy, Titus Annius Milo, on a charge of seditious violence before the popular assembly. (Milo had successfully disputed Clodius' control of the streets by hiring gladiators and other bravados.) Pompey had undertaken to appear for Milo at a preliminary hearing.

Pompey spoke [wrote Cicero] or intended to; in fact, as soon as he rose, the Clodian gang raised a clamour, and throughout his speech he was interrupted not only by shouting but by loud abuse and insults. When he had finished — in this he certainly showed courage; he was not frightened away, said his piece to the end, and now and again secured silence by his authority — up got Clodius. Our people made such a clamour — we had decided to show him the same courtesy — that he could not control his mind, tongue or expression. Pompey had barely finished at noon; this went on till two o'clock; every kind of insult and the most bawdy verses were shouted at Clodius and his sister. Livid with fury, Clodius asked his followers who was starving the people to death. The gang replied: "Pompey". Who wanted to go to Alexandria? "Pompey." Whom did they want to go? "Crassus" . . . At about three o'clock, as if at a signal, Clodius' people began to spit in unison at ours. A crescendo of anger. They began to shove our people out. We charged; the gangsters fled; Clodius was thrown off the platform, and I too took to flight; there might have been an accident.²

This was a relatively peaceful scene in the 50s. In 58, when Clodius was driving Cicero into temporary exile, a senator was killed in street fighting. The day after Cicero left Rome, before he had been condemned in law, his house on the Palatine was sacked and burned, and the mob marched out to treat his Tusculan villa in the same way. Later that year, Pompey kept to his house in fear for his life. In 57 the efforts of Milo and Sestius as tribunes to restore Cicero were met by violence; Sestius was left for dead in the street; Clodius brought gladiators into the senate-house. Milo and Sestius repelled force with force, until at last the gentry and bourgeoisie of all Italy came in

¹ Many statements can readily be verified in standard histories of Rome, or for the period covered, in Greenidge and Clay, *Sources for Roman History 133-70 B.C.*, revised by E. W. Gray (Oxford, 1960), or under the year named in T. R. S. Broughton, *Magistrates of the Roman Republic* (New York, 1951). All dates are B.C. unless otherwise stated. For all matters concerning the rural plebs and veterans mentioned see my article in *Jl. of Rom. Stud.*, lii (1962), pp. 70-86. Before revising this paper I could read only parts of Ch. Meier, *Res Publica Amissa* (Wiesbaden, 1966), esp. pp. 95-115. J. W. Heaton, *Mob Violence in the late Roman Republic* (*Illinois Studies in Soc. Science*, xxiii, 4, 1939) is inaccurate in details and superficial in interpretation.

² *ad Quintum fratrem*, ii. 3. 2.

to vote for Cicero's return. In November, an armed band drove off the workmen who were rebuilding his house, demolished a neighbouring portico and set fire to the mansion of his brother "with the city looking on". A week later, Cicero was going down the Sacra Via, the principal street in the city centre which ran from where the Colosseum now stands to the foot of the Capitol and was lined with great houses and luxury shops, when Clodius' gang attacked: "there were shouts, stones, clubs, swords, all without a moment's notice". Cicero was saved by his escort. Next day Clodius tried to storm Milo's house in a fashionable residential quarter. "Quite openly in the middle of the morning, he brought up men with shields and drawn swords and others with lighted torches". A successful counter-attack was made and Clodius fled for his life.³

Such violence reached a climax in early 52 when Milo at last succeeded in murdering Clodius outside Rome and a frenzied mob brought the body into the senate-house, tore down tribunal and benches, seized the clerk's papers and burned everything up, the senate-house itself and the adjacent Porcian basilica, in a great funeral pyre. A rather similar scene recurred in 44 when Caesar's body was burned, and the mob tore to pieces the poet, Helvius Cinna, under the misapprehension that he was a praetor who had publicly sympathized with Caesar's assassins.⁴ But, though the proportions of violence were unprecedented, violence itself was not something novel in Rome; for almost a century it had been growing more frequent.

I propose here to examine the conditions which favoured or caused it (II-IV), to sketch its progress (V), and to consider the composition of the mobs and their aims (VI-VII); I shall conclude by assessing what the mob achieved (VIII).

II

The true governing organ of the Roman Republic was the senate which acted through annual magistrates elected by the people but drawn from its own ranks. The senate itself was dominated by a few noble families whose power reposed on their wealth and on the

³ T. Rice Holmes, *Rom. Republic* (Oxford, 1923), i, pp. 330-3; ii, pp. 54-61; esp. Cic., *ad Atticum*, iv. 3. 2-3. Sacra Via, S. B. Platner, *Topograph. Dict. of Anc. Rome*, revised by T. Ashby (Oxford, 1929), pp. 456 ff.

⁴ For 52 Asconius, 32-3 (Oxf. text); Appian, *Civil Wars*, ii. 20 ff.; (Cassius) Dio, xl. 48 ff.; for 44 Appian, ii. 143-8; Dio, xlv. 35-51; Plutarch, *Caesar*, 68; *Antony*, 14; *Brutus*, 18; 20. The people were inflamed by the reading of Caesar's will in which he left his gardens for public use and a sum of money to every citizen domiciled at Rome.

number of their dependents, and on the prestige they derived from their past services to the state. Candidates for office seldom stood on programmes, and organized parties did not exist. Men were returned to office occasionally for personal merits (talent could carry outsiders like Cicero to the highest place), more often by reason of their munificence and lavish bribes, in general because of their family and connections. Birth and wealth usually went together. Cicero describes Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus as a man destined for the consulship since he was born; in 49 he could offer farms of thirty acres apiece to some thousands of soldiers. Such nobles had numerous dependents or clients who were morally expected and often economically compelled to support them.⁵ They used their power to grow richer from the profits of war and empire, and to oppose every measure to relieve the poor, the provision of cheap grain, the distribution of land or the remission of debt. Here they had the backing of the upper class in general, whose spokesman, Cicero, declared that the prime duty of government was to ensure "that every man kept his own". And public largesses, which did not infringe property rights, could be rejected on the ground that they were more than the treasury could bear, the treasury from which senators drew handsome allowances for themselves.⁶

In theory the people at Rome possessed great power. They elected the magistrates, declared war and ratified treaties, passed laws, and until the creation of standing courts in the late second century decided the most important criminal cases; to the end of the Republic some political charges came before them. From the late second century they voted by ballot; this naturally diminished aristocratic control.

There was more than one popular assembly. Of these the *comitia centuriata* was timocratically organized. Decisions were taken by a majority not of heads, but of voting units called centuries; the well-to-do, if they were of one mind, could decide the issues; the citizens with no property at all, and who are said to have outnumbered all the rest put together by the time of Augustus, formed only a single century, which might never even be called.⁷ The rural poor therefore

⁵ H. Jolowicz, *Hist. Introd. to the Study of Roman Law*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1952), chapters ii and iv, gives an excellent introduction to the Roman constitution. For the working of the political system see L. R. Taylor, *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar* (Berkeley, 1949). Domitius: Cic., *ad Atticum*, iv. 8a, 2. Caesar, *Civil War*, i. 17. Clients; see esp. M. Gelzer, *Kleine Schriften*, i (Wiesbaden, 1962), pp. 68 ff.

⁶ *de officiis*, ii. 72-end, cf. Brunt (n. 1), pp. 69 ff.

⁷ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Rom. Antiquities*, iv. 20. 5; 21. 1 (based on personal observation, 21. 3, after 30 B.C., i. 7. 2).

had little influence in this body the importance of which was great, for it elected the chief magistrates; and it was men who had held the highest offices who dominated the senate itself.

This assembly was also competent to legislate, but laws were more generally passed by a less cumbrous body, in which the voting units were thirty-five tribes. The tribes were local divisions of the people; thirty-one were rural and four urban, though all freedmen (except such as were substantial landowners) were registered, wherever domiciled, in the urban tribes. In the tribes, rich and poor had equal votes.⁸

At all times by far the greater number of citizens lived in the country, and it might seem that the organization of the tribal assembly ensured that the wishes of the rural majority would prevail, perhaps even to an undue extent; thirty-one to four was not the true proportion between town and country dwellers.⁹ However, as Professor Toynbee has recently pointed out, the system of primary democracy, in which the citizen can exercise his voting rights only by attending the sovereign assembly in person, can only work democratically if voters have not to spend more than two nights away from home.¹⁰ Even in the third century many citizens were a hundred miles distant from Rome, and after 80 they comprised the free population of Italy south of the Po. It was only on rare occasions that the peasants came in to vote. If the censors who held office every five years were careful to register every citizen who moved from the country into the city in an urban tribe instead of a rural, the votes of the rural tribes must have been exercised by the minority of their members who had the leisure and means to visit Rome for the purpose, the very same class of wealthy landowners who controlled the centuriate assembly.¹¹

It seems, however, that the censors did not do their work thoroughly. Dionysius of Halicarnassus sharply contrasts the centuriate assembly controlled by the respectable classes and the tribal, composed of artisans with no hearths of their own.¹² He purports to be describing the early Republic, but the picture is imaginary and drawn from the conditions known to the annalists of the first century. In the Principate urban dwellers are attested in rural tribes. One piece of

⁸ L. R. Taylor, *Voting Districts of the Roman Republic* (Rome, 1960) is fundamental on the tribes.

⁹ In 70, 910,000 adult male citizens were returned; there might have been much failure to register, but I hope to argue elsewhere that about 1,200,000 is a realistic figure; of these in the 40s about a quarter lived in Rome (III below).

¹⁰ *Hannibal's Legacy* (Oxford, 1965), I, p. 297.

¹¹ Taylor (n. 5), 57 ff.; cf. Brunt, *Jl. of Rom. Studies*, IV (1965), pp. 103 ff.

¹² IV. 16-21; VII. 59; VIII. 6; X. 17.

evidence suggests that this was possible as early as 133. Tiberius Gracchus, who had hitherto relied on the rural voters (one of the few known instances in which they swarmed in to vote), began to court the urban plebs, as his followers were occupied with the harvest. His action would have had little purpose, if the urban plebs had been confined to the four urban tribes. It may be indeed that even a few immigrants who had moved into Rome since the last census and had not yet been reregistered might have balanced or outvoted the wealthier members of their tribes, and that it was to such a handful of citizens that he appealed. Even so, urban dwellers were evidently influential in the rural tribes.¹³ And between 70 and 28 it is not clear that any census was completed.¹⁴ It seems probable then that normally the urban plebs had a majority in the tribal assembly.

However, the assemblies could do nothing except with the collaboration of a magistrate. They could meet only on his summons, and only vote "Yea" or "Nay" on his proposals; a private citizen could not even speak except on his invitation. The plebs could not obtain redress of its grievances, unless a magistrate drawn from the upper classes was prepared to take the initiative. Genuine social concern or personal ambition led nobles like the Gracchi, Caesar and Clodius to come forward as "popular" leaders from time to time, but there was no consistent and continuous opposition, no organized and enduring popular party.¹⁵

Even if a magistrate submitted a popular proposal, it did not follow that it would go through. It could be obstructed on religious pretexts, or vetoed. A single tribune could veto what all his nine colleagues proposed. The tribunate had arisen in the class struggles of the early Republic for the protection of popular interests, and in the second century Polybius could still say that it was the tribune's duty to do always what the people approved. To the end most of the champions of the commons acted as tribunes. None the less, Polybius' statement did not correspond to the constitutional practice

¹³ H. Dessau, *Inscript. Lat. Selectae*, 168; 176; 286; 6045 f.; 6063 f.; Appian, i. 14. Taylor (n. 5), p. 53 cites Cicero, *pro Sestio*, 109, but the assertion here that not more than five men might vote in a tribe could refer to uncontroversial legislation. Cic., *de lege agraria*, ii. 71 treats the voting rights of city dwellers as an important privilege, though motions to redistribute freedmen among the rural tribes in 88-7, 84 (*Perioche* of Livy, lxxxiv) and 66 (cf. Clodius' plan in 52, Asconius, 52) suggest that votes in the urban tribes were not much regarded.

¹⁴ G. Tibiletti, *Studia et Documenta Hist. et Iuris*, xxv (1959), pp. 94 ff. thinks that Sulla and Caesar as dictators revised the lists. I do not feel certain that use was not made of the incomplete revisions effected by some censors in the intervening years.

¹⁵ Ch. Meier, *Paulys Realencyclopädie der class. Altertumswissenschaft*, Suppl. x (1965), pp. 550-67.

that had evolved by his time. The senate could almost always find at least one tribune to act on its behalf and (as Livy put it) to use the tribunician veto to dissolve the tribunician power. Tribunes were often nobles themselves, or in Livy's words "chattels of the nobility". Marcus Octavius who vetoed Tiberius Gracchus' agrarian bill (see below page 18) was, for the middle and late Republic, the more typical tribune of the two.¹⁶

According to Burke "a state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation". At Rome there were too many checks and balances in the constitution, which operated in practice only in the interest of the ruling class. Reformers had to use force, or at least to create conditions in which the senate had reason to fear its use (see below pages 18 ff.). This was the first factor which favoured the growth of violence at Rome.

III

In the second place, Rome was even by modern standards a populous city, in which there was no garrison and no police to control the multitude.

To the total size of the population there is no direct testimony. But the number of recipients of free grain had risen to 320,000 in the 40s.¹⁷ Only adult males were normally eligible,¹⁸ and we therefore have to estimate the number of women and children in this class. The grain recipients were partly freeborn, partly freedmen. Appian implies that in 133 the poor were unable to raise children.¹⁹ Abortion and infanticide were not forbidden by the law, and many parents must have exposed their babies, some of whom might then be brought up as slaves by the finders. The infanticide of female infants must have been common even in the senatorial class, among whom in Augustus' reign men outnumbered women; if we make the reasonable assumption that it was still more prevalent with the poor, the birth-rate would also have been depressed by a scarcity of reproductive women.²⁰ There is some ground, however, for thinking that the urban plebs

¹⁶ Polyb., vi. 16; Livy, v. 2. 14; x. 37. 8 (both texts that reflect later conditions). Cicero, *de legibus*, iii. 24 describes the tribunate as "temperamentum quo tenuiores cum principibus aequari se putarent". On its rôle in the middle Republic see J. Bleicken, *Das Volkstribunat der klass. Republik* (Munich, 1955).

¹⁷ Suetonius, *Caesar*, 41; cf. Dio, xliii. 21. 4.

¹⁸ Trajan included some children, and Augustus made money gifts to children (Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 26; Suetonius, *Aug.*, 41); these seem exceptional, *contra* D. van Berchem, *Les distributions de blé et d'argent à la plèbe rom. sous l'empire* (Geneva, 1939), pp. 32 ff.

¹⁹ *Civil Wars*, i. 7.

²⁰ T. Mommsen, *Röm. Strafrecht* (Leipzig, 1899), pp. 617-20; 637; Dio, liv. 16. 2.

consisted preponderantly of freedmen (see below pages 15 f.), and particularly after Clodius made grain distributions free in 58 masters were very ready to manumit slaves, who could still be required to work for them, while obtaining rations from the state.²¹ Now it seems to me unlikely that there were so many female slaves or freedwomen as male slaves or freedmen. In this period slave-women were not needed to keep up the stock of slaves, most of whom were "made" by capture in war or kidnapping. And they were employable only for household duties and to some extent in spinning, weaving and making clothes, occupations perhaps more common on country estates than in town houses.²² Slaves might enter into a quasi-marriage, but both spouses were not necessarily freed together, and any children born in slavery, who were slaves themselves, might be manumitted only at a later date. In many thousand sepulchral inscriptions of freedmen at Rome (mainly imperial) under thirty per cent record offspring, and still fewer marriage.²³ For these reasons I doubt if we need more than double the figure of 320,000 to include both women and children of corn-recipients.

Well-to-do residents were presumably not numerically significant. There remain the slaves. A rich man required a large staff of domestic servants, secretaries etc; and his standing might be measured by the number of his attendants and flunkies. There might also be women engaged in textile work. Under Nero an eminent senator had four hundred slaves in his town-house.²⁴ However, in the 50s the scale of manumissions should have diminished the slave population. I guess that 100,000 would be a liberal estimate. The city population might then have been more or less than 750,000. Clodius' bill probably accelerated the drift from the country, but it had been going on before, and the number of slaves and freedmen had been progressively increasing. However, no numerical estimate can be ventured for any earlier date.²⁵

²¹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, iv. 24. 5; Dio, xxxix. 24. The services freedmen owed patrons are best discussed by C. Cosentini, *Studi sui liberti*, (1948-50).

²² T. Frank, *Econ. Survey of Anc. Rome* (Baltimore, 1933-40), i, pp. 374 f.; v, pp. 199 ff.; H. J. Loane, *Industry and Commerce in the City of Rome, 50 B.C.-200 A.D.* (Baltimore, 1938), pp. 69 ff.; cf. Dessau (n. 13), 8393 (30), where assiduity in wool-making is commemorated among the virtues of a great lady in Augustus' time; Asconius, 43 (Oxf.) for weaving "ex vetere more" in a town house.

²³ T. Frank, *Amer. Hist. Rev.*, xxi (1915/6), pp. 689 ff.

²⁴ Tacitus, *Ann.*, iii. 55; xiv, 43; cf. n. 22.

²⁵ Brunt (*op. cit.* in n. 1), pp. 69 f.; here I underestimated the opportunities of employment for free men (cf. p. 16 below), and went too far in minimizing the drift before 58. The building of the Marcian aqueduct in 144 is a notable indication of increased population.

In the early Principate the government had at least 12,000 soldiers in Rome, not to speak of seven cohorts, which ultimately and perhaps from the first comprised 7,000 men, raised to deal with fires; they were military units and could also be used as police. Even so, it was hard to keep order. In 39 B.C., though there were troops at hand which saved him in the end, Octavian was almost lynched in a riot, and Claudius later was only rescued by soldiers from a famished mob. The narrow, winding streets and high buildings (see below page 12) did not help in suppressing riots. In A.D. 238 the populace, armed by the senate, besieged the depleted praetorian guard in its camp; when the soldiers sallied out and pursued them into the streets,

the people climbed up into the houses and harassed the soldiers by throwing down on them tiles, stones and pots of all kinds; the soldiers dared not go up after them, not knowing their way about the houses; but as the houses and workshops had their doors barred, they set fire to the many wooden balconies; the tenements were set close together, and large parts of the buildings were wooden; so the flames soon devastated a very great part of the city, one section after another.

Something of the same kind nearly occurred in 88, when Sulla marched into the city. No doubt it was such dangers that made the emperors ready to spend large sums on "bread and circuses". In other towns they had no such motive to care for the poor and did not do so.²⁶

The aristocratic government of the Republic had no police available; the magistrates had but a few attendants. Nor were troops normally found in the city, though in 121 the consul happened to have at his disposal Cretan archers whom he used in suppressing the Gracchans.²⁷ How could the nobility ever hold the mob in check, when it was inflamed against the government?

The mob was generally unarmed and relied on sticks and stones. To carry arms was a capital offence,²⁸ and in any event the poor would possess none, except knives. Moreover, as legions were recruited in the country, not the city, the urban poor were not trained in the use of arms. The well-to-do would have their own equipment, including

²⁶ Imperial police: A. Passerini, *Le coorti pretorie* (Rome, 1939), pp. 44-66 (esp. on Dio, iv. 24. 6 and Tac., *Ann.*, iv. 5); P. K. Baillie Reynolds, *Vigiles of Imperial Rome* (Oxford, 1926); for their police duties see *Digest*, i. 15. 3. Riots: Appian, v. 68; Tac., *Ann.*, xii. 43; Herodian, vii, 12. 5; cf. Appian i. 58. Ch. Meier (n. 1), pp. 157 ff. is interesting on the lack of a police force in the Republic.

²⁷ Plutarch, *C. Gracchus* 16; Orosius, v. 12. 7.

²⁸ W. Kunkel, *Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung des röm. Kriminalverfahrens in vorsullanischer Zeit* (Munich, 1962), pp. 64 ff. shows that Sulla's law (cf. Cicero, *pro Milone*, 11) has much earlier antecedents (Plautus, *Aulularia*, 415 ff.). Arms were given to the "mob" in 121, 100, 88, 87, 62 (Plutarch, *Cato Minor*, 27 f.) and of course by Clodius; by the senate in 121 to senators, *equites* and their servants (Plutarch, *C. Gracchus*, 14), to the plebs or "populus" in 100 (Cic., *pro C. Rabirio*, 20; Oros., v. 17. 7), presumably only to reliable elements.

body-armour, and had mostly seen military service; and the senate could authorize the arming of their followers. On occasions popular leaders distributed arms illegally to the mob, but even then, man for man, their followers were probably unequal to their opponents. Though armed, the partisans of Gaius Gracchus in 121 put up but a feeble resistance. The numerous clients of the great houses in the city itself often enabled the governing class to make a stand against the mob, reciprocating or even initiating violence (see below pages 17, 21-2).

Given time, the senate or magistrates or individual nobles could call up clients with military experience from the country. In 100, men from Picenum took part in the suppression of Saturninus. The armed followers with whom Cicero surrounded himself during the Catilinarian conspiracy of 63 included chosen young men from Reate. In 59 he was hoping to resist Clodius by force; his friends and their clients, freedmen and slaves would band together in his defence. A great concourse of substantial citizens from all over Italy ensured that he was recalled from exile in 57, although his enemy, Clodius, remained dominant over the city proletariat. In 56 Pompey summoned followers from Picenum and the Po valley for his protection. To end the uproar ensuing on Clodius' murder in 52, the senate authorized a levy all over Italy, and soldiers restored order in the city. But between 59 and 52 the senate was generally impotent, because Pompey with his veterans and Caesar with his great army in the north could marshal forces stronger than the senate could command.²⁹

IV

The third factor in the turbulence of the city population may be found in the misery and squalor in which they lived, which naturally made them responsive to politicians who promised to improve their conditions and engendered hostility (if only intermittent) to the upper classes who showed little care for their interests.³⁰

²⁹ Cic., *pro C. Rabirio*, 22 (100); in *Catilinam*, i. 11; ii. 5; iii. 5; *pro Murena*, 52; cf. Sall., *Cat.*, 26. 4; 30. 7; 50. 4 (63). Cicero was accused of using armed slaves but claims to have mobilized in December all the upper classes, and all true citizens, indeed "omnis ingenuorum multitudo, etiam tenuissimorum" (implausible), *Phil.*, ii. 16; cf. in *Cat.*, iv. 15 f.; they took a military oath, Dio, xxxvii. 35. Rice Holmes, *Rom. Rep.*, ii, p. 60 (57); Cic., *ad Quintum fr.*, i. 2. 16 (59); ii. 3. 4 (56); Holmes, ii, p. 167 (52).

³⁰ In this section where references are omitted, the texts are cited by J. Carcopino, *Daily Life in Anc. Rome* (London, 1941), mainly based on imperial evidence; in the Republic things were worse. Z. Yavetz, *Latomus*, xvii (1958), pp. 500 ff. gives further details for Republic (e.g. on fearful conditions created by plagues); his references and interpretation of texts are not all reliable.

For lack of modern means of transport, the people were crammed into a small built-up area, not much larger than that of modern Oxford, with a density seven or eight times as great. The streets were winding and narrow, even main thorough-fares under twenty feet wide. While the rich had their luxurious mansions on the Palatine or spacious gardens in the suburbs, most inhabitants were penned into tiny flats in tenements, which had to be built high; Augustus imposed a limit of seventy feet (which suggests that this had been exceeded), and Trajan pronounced that dangerous, reducing it to sixty. Cicero contrasts a newly planned city with Rome "situated on hills and in valleys, lifted up and suspended in the air, with no fine streets to boast of but only narrow paths".

The lower parts of the city were subject to periodic floods, and the collapse and conflagration of buildings were common occurrences. In the Principate it is said that not a day passed without a serious fire, yet then there were 7,000 *vigiles* to put them out, in the Republic only a small force of publicly owned slaves. Crassus had a gang of five hundred builders, and bought up houses that were afire or adjacent to a blaze at knock-down prices with a view to rebuilding on the sites.³¹ These dangers were aggravated by bad methods of construction. Owners would not or could not afford to employ skilled architects or suitable materials. The local travertine cracked in fires, but it was too costly to bring better stone even fifty miles by land. A thin facing of stone might conceal a filling of soft rubble. To conserve space, party walls had to be not more than a foot and a half thick; given this limit, only baked brick was strong enough for high buildings, yet sun-dried brick was often used. Walls were sometimes of wattlework, the more dangerous as it was too expensive to bring larchwood, relatively impervious to fire, all the way from the Adriatic. In 44 Cicero reported to Atticus that two of his tenements had fallen down, and that cracks were showing in others; the tenants — and the mice — had all fled.³²

The houses of the poor must also have been ill-lit, ill-ventilated and unwarmed; facilities for cooking were inadequate; water had to be fetched from the public fountains, and the supply cannot have been abundant until the old conduits were repaired and new aqueducts built under Augustus; further, the tenements were not

³¹ Catullus, 23. 9; *Digest*, i. 15. 2; Plutarch, *Crassus*, 2.

³² Vitruvius, i. 3. 2; ii. 3. 2; 7. 3 f.; 8. 7-9; 8. 16 f.; 8. 20; 9. 14-17; vi. 8. 9; x. pr. 2; Cicero, *de divinatione*, ii. 99; *ad Att.*, xiv. 9. 1. Yavetz thinks that many of Vitruvius' precepts are directed against common bad practices in building.

connected with the public sewers. We may fairly suppose that most of the inhabitants of Rome lived in appalling slums. They offered shelter, but little more. As for furniture, Cicero speaks of the poor man as having no more than a stool and a bed where he lived, worked and slept.³³

From such tenements men like Cicero drew as landlords a good income. Cicero's property on the Aventine and in the Argiletum, probably two lower class districts, was in 44 bringing him in 80,000 HSS, enough to have paid 160 legionaries for a year under the rates that had obtained until recently; he appropriated it to the allowance for his undergraduate son at Athens, and was anxious to have tenants who would pay on the nail.³⁴ Perhaps that was not so easy to ensure. Then, as later, it is probable that the return on investment in house-property was high precisely because the risk was great.³⁵

In the 40s there was a prolonged agitation about urban rents. In 48 the praetor, Marcus Caelius, who proposed a year's remission, was driven out of the city by the consul, but only after bloodshed. Caesar, however, granted the remission in the same year, and perhaps extended it in 47, after further tumults, when barricades were raised, soldiers called in and eight hundred rioters killed. It applied to rents up to 2,000 sesterces in Rome, and 500 elsewhere, an indication that the cost of living in Rome was exceptionally high.³⁶ (A generation earlier, Cicero gave the daily wage for an unskilled labourer as three sesterces; obviously he could not have afforded 2,000 for a year's rent. We cannot say whether wages had risen in the interim, or whether the remission was intended to benefit people at a rather higher level, such as shopkeepers.) Cicero's comment is characteristic. "There is no equity in abolishing or suspending rents. Am I to buy and build and repair and spend, and you to have the benefit against my will? Is this not to take away the property of some and give to others what does not belong to them?"³⁷

How did the people of Rome live? Rome was never a great industrial city; indeed there never was any large-scale industry in the ancient world of the kind familiar since the industrial revolution: the

³³ Cic., in *Catilinam*, iv. 17.

³⁴ Cic., *ad Att.*, xii. 32. 2; xv. 17. 1; 20. 4; xvi. 1. 5.

³⁵ Gellius, xv. 1. 3. But F. Schulz, *Classical Roman Law* (Oxford, 1951), pp. 542 ff. shows how the law favoured owners against tenants.

³⁶ Caesar, *Civil Wars*, iii. 20 f.; Dio, xli. 37 f.; Appian, ii. 48 (Caelius); Dio, xlii. 29-33 (riots of 47). The *Fasti Ostienses* under 48 record a year's remission of rents; Dio, xlii. 51 puts remission in 47; other details in Suetonius, *Caesar*, 38; 42.

³⁷ Cicero, *pro Roscio comoedo*, 28; *de officiis*, ii. 83 f.

high cost of transport alone forbade the production of factory goods for a world-wide market.³⁸ Adjacent to Rome there were no abundant supplies of fuel or raw materials. The Tiber is not well suited to navigation, and the port of Ostia had not yet been developed; the larger ships had to discharge in an open roadstead into lighters. None the less far more use was made of the river and its affluents (for downstream traffic as well as for transport from the mouth) than we should expect from present conditions; the growth of the urban population left no alternative.³⁹ The supply of this population created a great demand for wholesale and retail traders, dock labour, carters and so on. So too large numbers must have been employed in the building trade: more fine public edifices were now being put up; the rich were continually erecting more luxurious town-houses and villas in the vicinity of Rome, and the increase of the population in itself required more tenements and shops, a demand augmented by the frequency of fires and collapses. Evidence from pre-industrial cities in other times may help to supply the lack of ancient statistics. In 1586 up to 6,000 workmen were engaged on public buildings at Rome, of whom 800 with 150 horses were needed to move the obelisk into the Piazza of St Peter's; at the time the total population seems to have been under 100,000. In 1791 a third of all Paris wage-earners were occupied in the building trade.⁴⁰ In addition, there were artisans and shopkeepers of all kinds, many of whom must have sold goods they made themselves, perhaps to the order of clients. Beggars, curiously, are hardly ever mentioned, perhaps because the Romans (unlike the Jews, and the Christians after them) recognized no special obligation to relieve the poor as such; it was another matter if the great houses supported idle dependents, whose votes and strong arms they could employ; on them they conferred benefits in accordance with the usual principle of Roman morality: "do ut des".⁴¹

According to tradition king Numa had organized craftsmen into *Collegia* or corporations of flautists, goldsmiths, carpenters — the word *fabri* came to mean builders in all sorts of material — dyers, shoemakers, coppersmiths and potters. If only these particular

³⁸ See e.g. A. H. M. Jones, *Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964), ii, pp. 841 ff.

³⁹ See R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia* (Oxford, 1960), chapters iii, iv and viii; J. le Gall, *Le Tibre, fleuve de Rome dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1953), *passim*; L. Casson, *Jl. of Rom. Stud.*, lv (1965), pp. 31 ff.

⁴⁰ J. Delumeau, *Vie écon. et sociale de Rome dans la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1959), i, pp. 366 f.; cf. p. 281. G. Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1959), p. 19.

⁴¹ H. Bolkestein, *Wohltätigkeit u. Armenspflege im vorchristlichen Altertum* (Utrecht, 1939), *passim*; for beggars, pp. 339-41; add Seneca, *de beata vita*, 25.

corporations were in fact ancient, they go back to a very remote time, when for instance the use of iron was still unknown; in the historic period there must have been many ironworkers, especially to make arms for the legions which were regularly enrolled and equipped just outside the city. The list also does not include bakers; according to Pliny there were none down to the middle of the second century; the women used to grind and bake at home; presumably they ceased to do so, when so many of the poor were lodged in houses without suitable ovens. In the course of time many more corporations came into existence. The fishermen who fished in the Tiber had an old festival. Fulling ceased to be a domestic craft. Plautus casually mentions a score of other trades. Cato in the second century recommended buying at Rome tunics, togas, cloaks, patchwork cloth and wooden shoes (though some of these things were also made on his estates), and in addition jars, bowls, ploughs, yokes, locks and keys and the finest baskets.⁴²

As in medieval towns men of one craft tended to congregate. There was a pottery district, and streets were named after the silversmiths, grain merchants, sandal-makers, timber merchants, log-sellers, perfumers and scythemakers, probably many more.⁴³ *Collegia* of artisans would thus be composed of neighbours.

Many traders and artisans were not of free birth. Slaves were employed in every trade, craft and profession. Freedom was a necessary incentive to good work and seems often to have been granted fairly soon, or bought by the slave from the wage or share of the profits he was allowed. The freedman naturally worked at his old trade and was probably often still financed by his old master. Most of our evidence comes from epitaphs, which tend no doubt to give the impression that more craftsmen were free than was the case; most slaves who appear had probably been unlucky enough to die early. Of jewellers and goldsmiths at Rome, to take one instance, 35% are slaves, 58% freedmen, only 7% of free birth. The last figure is astoundingly low. But the inscriptions only fortify the

⁴² For trades at Rome see Loane (n. 22); for *collegia* J-P. Waltzing, *Ét. hist. sur les corporations professionnelles chez les romains*, i-iv (Louvain, 1895-1900), esp. i, pp. 62-92 (Republic); W. Liebenam, *Zur Gesch. u. Organisation des röm. Vereinswesens* (Leipzig, 1890); F. M. de Robertis, *Il Diritto Associativo Romano* (Bari, 1938). Numa, Plutarch, *Numa*, 17; arms factories, Livy, xxi. 57. 10; Cic., *Phil.*, vii. 13; bakers, Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, xviii. 107; fishing, Festus, 232; 274L; Horace, *Sat.*, ii. 2, 31 ff.; fulling, Pliny, xxxv. 197 (220 B.C.); Vitruv., vi. pr. 7 (no longer domestic); Cato: see his *de agricultura*, 135. Waltzing gives a list of known *collegia* at Rome; for Republican *collegia* there and in Italian towns attested in inscriptions, see A. Degraffi, *Inscr. Lat. liberae reipublicae* (Florence, 1963), ii, pp. 476 ff.

⁴³ Liebenam (n. 42), p. 9 f.

evidence we have from literary sources that in the urban population as a whole, as well as in the crafts and trades, men of servile origin preponderated. The statistics may exaggerate the preponderance; the freeborn may have been less ready to indicate manual employments in which they took no pride or even to commemorate their lives at all (a freedman could be proud of having been freed); they may even have been too poor to leave a record, having been confined to unskilled and unremunerative work.⁴⁴

Many freedmen (perhaps most in Rome) came from the east and probably brought with them new skills; with the capital their patrons provided, they thus had an advantage over native workmen.⁴⁵ Freeborn Italians, some of whom were displaced peasants, would then have had no means of employment except casual, unskilled labour. They could go out into the country for the harvest, vintage and olive-picking, just as Londoners go out today to pick the Kent hops. This is well attested, and can be explained. The Roman landowner preferred to rely on a permanent labour-force of slaves, but as Cato makes clear, he did not wish to feed idle mouths. For seasonal operations, therefore, he required supplementary labour provided by free hired men.⁴⁶ On the same principle we must suppose that most dock labour and the ancillary carting of supplies was free; there was little sailing for half the year, and work must have bunched in a few months or weeks.⁴⁷ And it required no special skill. Similarly building contractors, whose business is likely to have fluctuated, would not have found it profitable to keep enough slaves throughout the year for *all* their work. The builders on Cicero's Tusculan villa went back to Rome to collect their free grain rations as citizens. It has been plausibly conjectured that the distress Tiberius Gracchus sought to alleviate had been newly aggravated by unemployment resulting from the completion of the Marcian aqueduct. The emperor Vespasian was to refuse to adopt a labour-saving device; if he did so, he asked, how could he feed his poor commons?⁴⁸

⁴⁴ L. R. Taylor, *Amer. Jl. of Philology*, lxxiii (1961), pp. 113 ff., with earlier literature; add A. M. Duff, *Freedmen in the Early Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1928), ch. vi.

⁴⁵ Also, like Jews and Quakers at other times, they were barred from many other activities and their energies were directed into economic advancement.

⁴⁶ Brunt (n. 1), p. 72. Toynbee (n. 10), ii, pp. 296 ff. on Cato.

⁴⁷ J. Rougé, *Rév. des Et. anc.*, liv (1954), pp. 316 ff. Piracy or hope of great profits made merchants sail in winter; Claudius had to assume the risk of storm damage, to induce shipowners to bring grain to Rome in winter (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, ii. 125; Suetonius, *Claud.*, 18).

⁴⁸ Cic., *ad Att.*, xiv.3.1; H. C. Boren, *Amer. Jl. of Philol.*, lxxix (1958), pp. 140 ff; *Amer. Hist. Rev.*, lxiii (1957-8), pp. 890 ff; Suetonius, *Vespasian*, 18. See Loane (n. 22), pp. 79 ff; builders naturally had permanent gangs of slaves too.

Sallust and others tell of the drift of countryfolk into Rome; Sallust speaks of young men who had barely made a livelihood with labour in the fields and were attracted by the private and public largesses in the city, and Cicero could urge the urban plebs with some success in 63 not to forsake the advantages of life there, their votes (which could of course be sold), games, festivals and so on, for land allotments in barren or malarial places. What Sallust says of the private largesses is probably important; the great houses could afford to maintain clients, and they might even be given rent-free lodgings.⁴⁹ Sometimes magistrates, to enhance their popularity, distributed grain or oil at low prices, bearing the cost themselves.⁵⁰ Above all there were the cheap or free public corn-doles instituted generally by popular leaders, partly perhaps to reduce the dependence of the plebs on noble patrons. However, the distributions were not free until 58, the liberality of the cheap distributions provided under Gaius Gracchus' law in 123 was soon reduced and not restored till 100, and distributions were in abeyance from 80 to 73 and restricted to only some 40,000 recipients from 73 to 62.⁵¹ Moreover men could not live on bread and shows alone; there was other food, and clothes to be paid for, and rent. Augustus was to introduce a quicker method of distributing free grain which did not take the recipients away from their work so long as in the past.⁵² The people of Rome had to earn much of their living, and for many of them casual employment was the only means. Gaius Gracchus must have won much support by his programme for building roads and granaries.⁵³

The feeding of the city population was also a grave problem. There were large imports from Sicily, Sardinia and Africa, but the supply was precarious, liable to be interrupted by piracy and wars. Much grain must still have come from Italy, or else the population

⁴⁹ Sall., *Catiline*, 37 (cf. Varro, *de re rustica*, ii. pr. 3; Appian, ii. 120; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 42); Cic., *de lege agraria*, ii. 72. Rent paid, Trebatius in *Dig.*, ix. 3. 5. 1.

⁵⁰ E.g. Cicero, in *Verrem*, ii. 3. 215, *de officiis*, ii. 58; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, xv. 2; xviii. 16.

⁵¹ Brunt (n. 1), p. 70 n. 10. R. J. Rowland Jr., *Acta Antiqua*, xiii. 81 denies the restriction in 73 without explaining the evidence for it (Sallust *Oratio Macri*, 19 with Cicero in *Verrem*, ii. 3. 72) on the ground that Sicilian surpluses in the late 70s acquired by the government sufficed for 180,000 (in *Verrem*, ii. 3. 163); but some of this grain was probably needed for large armies in Italy and Spain, and the rest sold at market prices, which fluctuated (*ibid.*, 215).

⁵² Suetonius, *Aug.*, 42.

⁵³ Plutarch, *C. Gracchus*, 6. About 85 a praetor, Marius Gratidianus, gained great popularity by trying to eliminate debased coinage, see Broughton (n. 1), ii, p. 57; this seems to imply that the masses were interested in stopping an inflationary rise in prices.

could not have survived the years 43-36, for most of which it was cut off from oversea supplies.⁵⁴ The public rations did not suffice for a family,⁵⁵ and some, if only a minority, of the recipients must have had wives and children. Some grain had to be bought on the market, even in the years when there were public distributions to most of the free population. In 57-6 it seems likely that there was not enough in the public granaries to honour the state's obligation; the market price was a matter of general concern and might soar to famine rates (see below pages 25 f.). And market prices fluctuated sharply, soaring when the harvests were poor and when hoarding by growers and merchants aggravated the shortage. It is an illusion that in the late Republic the urban plebs was usually well and cheaply fed by the state. As for modern scholars who repeat ancient gibes that the doles corrupted the urban population, one must wonder if they would also condemn all modern measures of social welfare; in Rome there were no charitable foundations for the poor, and no unemployment benefits.

V

The progress of violence may now be sketched. In 133 Tiberius Gracchus proposed to redistribute among the poor public lands which the rich had occupied. His colleague, Octavius, interposed a veto; Gracchus had him deposed by vote of the assembly, an unprecedented act which set aside the most important of the constitutional checks. His bill was then carried. Actual violence was not used, but the menacing attitude of the peasantry who had flocked in to back Gracchus may explain why Octavius did not dare to veto the motion for his own deposition. Later in the year the senators charged Gracchus with aspiring to tyranny and lynched him in public. The first open act of illegal political violence came from the nobility.

In 123-2 Gaius Gracchus as tribune carried many anti-senatorial measures. (In 123 no other tribune had the will or courage to oppose him; he had the backing of both urban and rural plebs and of the *equites*, rich men outside the senate, on whom he conferred important benefits; he did not need to use force.) But eventually he lost popular favour and office, and as a private person in 121 armed his

⁵⁴ M. Rostovtzeff, *Paulys Realencyclopädie*, vii (1910), pp. 126 ff., who like all writers (esp. Toynbee, *Hannibal's Legacy*, ii, pp. 296 ff.; pp. 585 ff.) unduly depreciates the continuance of cereal cultivation in Italy; I hope to show this elsewhere.

⁵⁵ 5 *modii* (about 41 litres) a month. Cato gave his slaves 3-4½, according to the heaviness of their work: *de agric.*, 56.

followers to obstruct the repeal of one of his laws; he and they were massacred by senatorial forces quite legally.⁵⁶

In 103 and 100 the tribune, Saturninus, who also proposed land-distribution and revived the grain dole on the Gracchan scale, did not scruple to murder opponents and rivals; he too was suppressed by the senate. In 88 the tribune Sulpicius, promoting the interests of the newly enfranchised Italians, and also of the freedmen whom he proposed to redistribute among all the tribes, drove his opponents from the forum by force; the consul, Sulla, appealed to his army (where his ability and generosity assured him of support), marched on Rome and proscribed Sulpicius and his friends. This was the first occasion on which the army was employed to overturn decisions made at Rome; once again, it was a noble and conservative who took the fatal step. Sulla's successor, Cinna, revived Sulpicius' proposals; the streets ran with blood in conflict between him and his colleague, Octavius. Defeated in the city, Cinna imitated Sulla in appealing to the army and with like success. Only a great civil war concluded this phase of the revolution and enabled Sulla to restore and consolidate the senate's control of the state.

So far it is not clear that the urban proletariat, even though it owed cheap grain to popular leaders, took a strong part against the senate, which in 100 and 87 is said to have had the support of the townsmen. The Gracchi and Saturninus relied chiefly on the rural poor, Cinna and perhaps Sulpicius on the new Italian citizens. Sulla, however, severely limited the powers of tribunes and put an end to corn doles. The latter measure directly injured the urban poor, and the former denied them hope of redress for their grievances.

In the 70s the prevalence of piracy began to affect the corn-supply. In 75 the price of grain was cruel, and a mob attacked the consuls proceeding along the Sacra Via and put them to flight; this riot does not seem to have been "incited by demagogues".⁵⁷ The senate itself re-instituted corn doles in 73, but on a miserably limited scale (see above note 51). Pompey in 70 forced through the restoration of the tribunes' powers; he probably envisaged that tribunician legislation could be advantageous to him (as it proved); and his wishes could not be denied, as he had a large and loyal army outside the city. Three years later, the tribune Gabinius had a great command

⁵⁶ The biased and contradictory evidence hardly enables us to decide the extent to which *either* of the Gracchi was to blame. Amid the tumults the true facts may never have been known.

⁵⁷ Sallust, *Hist. fragments*, iii. 45 f. Shipping had been diverted from the corn-trade, and the treasury was short of money, *Oratio Cottae*, 6 f. Cf. also *Oratio Macri*, 19.

conferred on Pompey to put down the pirates. Almost all the senators opposed the bill; the mob stormed the senate-house and put them to flight. Tribunes who tried to interpose their veto were overawed by a threat of deposition. The people would not tolerate any opposition to a measure that might end the scarcity. Pompey's mere appointment resulted in fact in an immediate and abrupt fall in the price of grain, and within a few weeks he cleared the seas of pirates.⁵⁸ His prestige was such that he could not be debarred from another great command in the east. It could be foreseen that on his return with a large army he would be potentially master of the state. This was why the senate had resisted the proposal in 67 to grant him extraordinary powers.

The years from 67 to 62 (when Pompey came back) were full of violence and threats of violence. In 63 Catiline rose in arms against the government with a band of discontented peasants. The urban plebs had at first favoured him, perhaps because his proposal to cancel debts would have relieved them of some payments of rent-arrears. Cicero won them over to the government by alleging that Catiline's friends in the city intended to burn it down and deprive them of their miserable shelter and few personal belongings.⁵⁹ But his execution without trial of Catiline's accomplices violated the principle on which the humblest Roman relied for the protection of his own person. Cicero incurred the lasting hatred of the masses. When Clodius had him banished in 58, he erected a shrine to Liberty on the site of Cicero's town house; he had vindicated the freedom of citizens against arbitrary ill-treatment by magistrates.⁶⁰

Early in 62 Marcus Cato greatly extended the scale of distribution of cheap grain. He was the staunchest champion of the senate's power. It seems paradoxical that he should be the author of this measure. But the urban masses were volatile, and it was necessary to assuage their discontents, when Catiline was still in arms and there was a proposal to bring Pompey back to deal with the crisis.⁶¹

The fears entertained of Pompey proved unjustified. On his return he disbanded his army. But he needed to reward his veterans with land-allotments. Senatorial obstruction threw him into alliance with

⁵⁸ Cicero, *de imperio Cn. Pompeii*, 31-5; 44, cf. Rice Holmes i, pp. 167 ff.

⁵⁹ Cicero, *in Catilinam*, iii. 15; 21; 25; iv. 17; Sallust, *Catiline*, 48. 2.

⁶⁰ Ch. Wirszubski, *Libertas as a Political Idea at Rome* (Cambridge, 1950), pp. 24-7; 55-61; Rice Holmes, i, pp. 82 f. Cicero's unpopularity, *ad Att.*, i. 16. 11; ii. 3. 4; viii. 11 D. 7; Asconius, 37 (Oxf.); in *Phil.*, vii. 4 he refers to himself as a well-known adversary of the multitude. Temple of Liberty, Plutarch, *Cic.*, 33.

⁶¹ Plutarch, *Cato Minor*, 26-9.

Caesar, who had consistently identified himself with popular aims, and as consul in 59 Caesar carried agrarian laws by the help of the strong arms of Pompey's veterans. In return, he received the great command in Gaul. To check senatorial reaction, once Caesar had left for his province, Pompey and Caesar promoted the election to the tribunate of Publius Clodius, and it was Clodius who finally made the grain distributions free. This was the prime source of the enormous popularity he enjoyed with the plebs so long as he lived. Another measure, to be considered presently, ensured that he, unlike previous demagogues, remained powerful in the city even when out of office.

VI

This sketch will have shown that violence at Rome did not proceed from any single section of the people. Before Sulla "popular" leaders drew support mainly from citizens who came in from the country to vote and fight in the streets; in 70 it was Pompey's army (recruited in the country) that made the restoration of tribunician power irresistible; in 59 it was again his veterans who forced through Caesar's bills. On the other hand, in 67 it was the *urban* plebs which broke the opposition to Gabinius' law, and in most of the post-Sullan period it is their riots that we hear of. But the senate also, or some of its members, initiated illegal violence from time to time, or at least met force with force. They could mobilize their clients not only from other parts of Italy (see above page 11), but within the city itself. The urban plebs was not an united body, and sometimes we are not told what section of it took this or that action.⁶²

In annalistic accounts of the class-struggles in the early Republic, which are coloured in detail by the experience of the second and first centuries, we hear much of the dependents (clients) of the nobility supporting them against plebeian leaders.⁶³ In 133 the assailants of Tiberius Gracchus included, besides members of the upper classes, "the plebs uncontaminated by pernicious schemes".⁶⁴ The nobility drew support within the city against Saturninus in 100 and Cinna in 87; and it may be that we should think of this coming rather from their own clients than from the urban masses in general (though Saturninus' followers were countrymen, and Cinna's new citizens from Italy, and neither is known to have had much urban backing). Cicero's claims that his return in 57 was popular, if true at all, may

⁶² Meier (n. 1), pp. 112 f. is too ready to assume that where the people is mentioned, the urban plebs is meant.

⁶³ E.g. Livy, ii. 35. 4; 56. 3; 64. 2; iii. 14. 4; 16. 4; v. 32. 8; 30. 4; vi. 18. 5; 37. 6 f.; Dionysius, vii. 18. 2; viii. 71. 3; ix. 41. 5; 44. 7 etc.

⁶⁴ Velleius, ii. 3. 2.

be so only in the sense that the dependents of the nobility demonstrated in his favour.⁶⁵ Tacitus' distinction for A.D. 69 between "the sound section of the populace, attached to the great houses" and the "sordid plebs, habitués of the circus and theatres" may be relevant.⁶⁶ But perhaps some Republican acclamations of "anti-popular" figures in the theatres might be explained by the hypothesis that they were crowded with clients, for whom their patrons had procured places.⁶⁷

Sallust asserts that in 63 the whole plebs was at first on Catiline's side against the government, which he explains by saying that invariably men who have nothing are envious of the "good" — the term is in practice indistinguishable from "rich"; "they hate the old order and yearn for a new; in detestation of their own lot they work for total change; to them turmoil and riots are a source not of anxiety, but of nourishment; for the destitute cannot easily suffer any loss". Cicero too more than once says that the property and fortunes of the rich were endangered by Clodius' gangs; and the existence of class-hatred in Rome can hardly be doubted; it is significant that in 52 the mob killed anyone they met wearing gold rings or fine clothes.⁶⁸ But it was not felt or evinced by *all* the poor there; a large number depended on the upper classes.

Sallust thought that the plebs was at a disadvantage against the nobility in that it was less organized. It could do nothing except with leadership from inside the ruling class.⁶⁹ It was also notoriously volatile, and could be persuaded to desert its leaders by the plausible demagoguery of senatorial spokesmen, as in 122 and 33.⁷⁰ And no popular leader before Clodius sought to organize his supporters in such a way that they would effectively support him beyond the brief period for which he held office.

The Twelve Tables, the ancient code of Roman law, apparently allowed freedom of association, if there was no conflict with public

⁶⁵ *ad Att.*, iv. 1. 5. His claim that all *collegia* supported his return cannot be accepted (*de domo*, 74); some must have done so, perhaps those with upper-class officers (for whom see *ad Quintum fratrem*, ii. 6. 2; Dessau (n. 13) 2676). Cicero also boasts of the popularity of his policy in 43 (*Phil.*, vii. 22; xiv. 16); improbable, as it was likely to result in corn-scarcity (xiv. 5); viii. 8 is significant: "omnes idem volunt . . . cum omnis dico, eos excipio quos nemo civitate dignos putat". Cf. *pro Milone*, 3: "reliqua multitudo, quae quidem civium est, tota nostra est"; Asconius, 32; 37; 40; 42 shows that the masses were against Milo.

⁶⁶ *Hist.*, i. 4.

⁶⁷ E.g. *Cic.*, *ad Att.*, ii. 19. 3.

⁶⁸ *Sall.*, *Cat.*, 37; *Cic.*, *pro Sestio*, 49; III; *de domo*, 12 f.; *pro Plancio*, 86; *pro Milone*, 95; cf. Appian, ii. 22 with modern parallels in G. Rudé, *Crowd in History* (New York, 1964), pp. 224 f.

⁶⁹ *Jugurthine War*, 41. 6 as interpreted by J. Hellegouarc'h, *Vocabulaire Latin des relations et des partis* . . . (Paris, 1963), p. 101; *Cic.*, *pro Murena*, 50.

⁷⁰ Cf. Livy, vi. 17.

law.⁷¹ Many *collegia* of artisans as such or of persons living in the same district (*vicus*) thus arose, some at a very early date. Evidently some of them were implicated in riots in the 60s, and in 64 the senate dissolved all "except a few named corporations required by the public interest". At the time Catiline was standing for the consulship, and it was probably feared that they would exert themselves on his behalf. In 58 a law of Clodius restored the right of association, and he himself organized *collegia*, old and new, on a local basis in para-military units and provided a supply of arms. The proximity of Caesar's army and the backing the consuls who also had some soldiers gave Clodius, made it impossible for the senate to resist; and henceforth Clodius was an independent power in Rome, even when a private individual, thanks to his control of the *collegia*.⁷²

Only from Cicero do we know anything of the composition of Clodius' bands. He speaks of slaves, including runaways and thugs whom Clodius had bought himself for the purpose of terrorism, criminals — "assassins freed from the jail", which Clodius "emptied into the forum" — foreigners; at best they were hirelings (*operae, conducti, mercennarii*). Clodius was a rich man, and according to Cicero he acquired illicit funds to distribute; no doubt he could afford to buy or hire armed escorts. Freedmen and indeed slaves were admitted to *collegia* in large numbers (as inscriptions show), and such people, foreigners by extraction, naturally formed a substantial element in his gangs. Wherever slavery is found, there are always runaways, and in the unpoliced purlieu of Rome they could easily lurk. Rome must also have provided armed robbers with ample opportunities, though it may be noted that in Roman law imprisonment was not a penalty, and if Clodius freed prisoners, they may have been not only persons merely awaiting trial but also men seized for debt.⁷³ Cicero's descriptions are, however, suspect; he admits

⁷¹ *Digest*, xlvii. 22. 4.

⁷² Asconius, 7; 45; 59 f.; 75 (Oxf.); Cic., *pro Murena*, 71. If the *Commentariolum Petitionis* is by Q. Cicero, or at least well-informed, the suppression must be later in 64; cf. sect. 30. Clodius' law: e.g. Ascon., 8; Cic., *Sest.*, 33 f.; 55; *de domo*, 54; *in Pisonem*, 8-11. Caesar's army, *Sest.*, 40 f.; *dom.*, 131; cf. E. Meyer, *Caesars Monarchie u. das Principat des Pompeius* (Stuttgart, 1922), 3rd edn., p. 94. Consuls' soldiers, *dom.*, 55; 119.

⁷³ See e.g. *Sest.*, 6; 27; 34; 38; 53; 57; 59; 65; 75; 78; 81 f.; 84 f.; 89; 95; 106; 112; 126 f.; *de domo*, 5-7; 13; 45; 53 f.; 75; 79; 89 f.; 92; 129; *in Pisonem*, 8-11. Clodius' funds, *de haruspicum responsis*, 28. Runaways, W. Buckland, *Rom. Law of Slavery* (Cambridge, 1908), pp. 257 ff. Dionysius, iv. 24. 5 attests the practice of liberating thugs; Augustus was to bar such freedmen from citizenship or from living within 100 miles of Rome. For riots ascribed to slaves, freedmen and hirelings before 58, cf. Ascon., 45; 66; Cic., *ad Att.*, i. 1. 13; 14. 5; ii. 1. 8.

himself that it was a common rhetorical device to vilify all who attended political meetings as "exiles, slaves, madmen", and we know of at least one occasion when he chose to speak of freedmen as slaves⁷⁴. In his view Clodius was Catiline's heir and enjoyed the support of survivors from his movement; we may recall that Catiline had originally had the favour of the whole urban population.

Cicero writes of Clodius' followers much as contemporaries of the better classes wrote of the mobs which rioted in Paris in 1789-95 or 1848, or in English towns of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; they were, it was said, banditti, desperadoes, ragamuffins, convicts and the like. Professor Rudé has shown that wherever records exist to check these descriptions they prove to be largely false. Men with criminal convictions were never more than a minority among the rioters; mostly they were men of "fixed abode and settled occupation"; for instance, all the 662 "vainqueurs de la Bastille" were small workshop masters and journeymen, retailers, artisans and labourers of all kinds.⁷⁵ In Rome the Catilinarians tried to raise "the *artisans* and slaves", and Cicero lets out that Clodius' following included shopkeepers; when he wished to gather a mob, he had the shops closed, a practice common with seditious tribunes.⁷⁶ We should not assume on his biased testimony that artisans and shopkeepers needed to be incited or hired on every occasion to give up their day's earnings and risk their lives and limbs in a demonstration, without real grievances to demonstrate about. In 41, when famine was raging, "the people closed their shops and drove the magistrates from their places, thinking that they had no need of magistrates or crafts in a city suffering from want and robbery [by soldiers]".⁷⁷ Then at least they acted without any demagogue to instigate and pay them. I suspect that when Shakespeare makes a carpenter and a cobbler typical members of the Roman mob, he was, by intuition, right, and that Clodius would have had little power over such people but that they had complaints and looked on him as their champion. But even if most of them (freedmen included) were artisans and shopkeepers, that would not have endeared them to Cicero; he had once spoken of "artisans, shopkeepers and all the scum in cities whom it is so easy to excite". He characterizes the Clodians as "destitute" (*egentes*); but their plight did not evoke his compassion; the word is

⁷⁴ Cic., *Academica*, ii. 144; Ascon., 52, cf. 8. 23.

⁷⁵ Rudé (n. 68), pp. 7 f.; pp. 195 ff.

⁷⁶ Sallust, *Catiline*, 50. 1; Cic., *de domo*, 13; 54; 89 f.; *Academica*, ii. 144; Asconius, 40 f.

⁷⁷ Appian, v. 18.

almost a synonym with the epithet which often accompanies it — “scoundrels” (*perditi*). He recognized that the plebs was “wretched and half-starved”, but added at once that it was “the bloodsucker of the treasury”.⁷⁸ It was such attitudes on the part of the governing class which gave Clodius his opportunity.

VI

Violence was actuated by many different aims. The clients of the great houses used it simply in their patrons’ interest, the followers of popular leaders sometimes merely from loyalty to their leaders. But they were attached to the “demagogues” because the demagogues were active for their welfare. Country people, including the veterans, usually sought land distributions. The burden of rent, indignation at arbitrary punishments, proposals to redistribute freedmen among all the tribes could sometimes raise an urban mob. But in 75, 67, in the heyday of Clodius’ ascendancy and again in 41 and 39 hunger seems to have been the chief motive force.⁷⁹

When Cicero was banished, there was a scarcity; his sarcasm that the bands who pulled down his house were not going to satisfy their appetite on tiles and cement implies that they were hungry.⁸⁰ Clodius’ grain law may have increased the effective demand, which certainly outran the supply. In July 57 there was a food riot. A few days later, when the senate voted for Cicero’s restoration, the price of grain providentially sank. It was but a temporary improvement. For days together the senate debated the corn supply. Cicero gave three possible explanations for the shortage: exporting provinces had no surplus, or they sent it elsewhere to get higher prices, or the suppliers held grain in store in the expectation of famine rates. On the 5th September he boasted that plenty had returned with him. This was an illusion. Prices continued to oscillate (a familiar phenomenon in many ages). On the next two days they went sky-high, and the mob rose; Cicero acknowledged that there was suffering and hunger. He and others did not venture to the senate-house. But a day or two later he risked attendance; the streets were evidently

⁷⁸ *Pro Flacco*, 18; *ad Att.*, i. 16. 11; 19. 4; ii. 1. 8. “Egentes” and “perditi”, e.g. *de domo*, 45.

⁷⁹ The locust plague in Africa in 125 (Orosius, v. 11. 2) may also have paved the way for Gaius Gracchus; for hunger in the Gracchan period: cf. Lucilius, fragment 214 (Loeb edn.). In the 40s too the rent-burden must have been the greater, as Africa was under Pompeian control and grain must have been scarce and dearer, leaving less money to pay the rent.

⁸⁰ *De domo*, 61. For what follows see *de domo*, 9-17 with Asconius, 48; *Cic., post reditum in senatu*, 34; *ad Quirites*, 18; *ad Att.*, iv. 1. 6; *ad Quintum fratrem*, ii. 5. 1; *de haruspicum responsis*, 31.

quiet again. If the rioters had been merely Clodius' hirelings, out for Cicero's blood, this would be strange; if they were exasperated artisans and shopkeepers, with work to do, they could not be kept in the streets continuously. On Cicero's motion Pompey was now invested with the procurement of grain and given wide powers, probably enabling him to requisition grain from recalcitrant suppliers. Plutarch thought he secured abundance as by magic, but soon all was not well again, and now the blame could be laid on Pompey. Hence, in the scene with which I opened, the mob shouted that Pompey was starving them. In April 56 there were renewed debates on the high price of grain, and Pompey was voted more money. In August Cicero deplored high costs, the infertility of the fields, the poor harvest. Persistent scarcity was the background to continual violence.

Rudé has shown that in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France and England riots were often (not always) provoked by, or associated with scarcities, whatever their avowed aims. In October 1789, when the Paris mob went to bring the royal family from Versailles, they said that they would fetch "the baker, the baker's wife and the little baker boy"; they thought that there would be plenty with the king in their midst.⁸¹ If we had data for the fluctuating grain prices at Rome, it might well be that we could plot a correlation with the outbreaks of mob violence. But this must remain a speculation.

VII

If we look beyond the ambitions and machinations of the great figures of the late Republic, the main cause of its fall must in my view be found in agrarian discontents; it was the soldiers, who were of peasant origin, whose disloyalty to the Republic was fatal. The rôle of the *urban* mob was more restricted. Still, it was their clamour that gave Pompey his extraordinary command in 67 and set in motion the events that led to his alliance with Caesar in 59. And the violence in the city from 58 to 52, which was itself one result of that alliance, produced such chaos that it finally brought Pompey and the senatorial leaders together again, and helped to sever his connection with Caesar; hence the civil wars in which the Republic foundered.

Popular leaders sometimes proclaimed the sovereignty of the people. But the people who could actually attend meetings at Rome were not truly representative and were incapable of governing an empire. The only workable alternative to the government of the few

⁸¹ Rudé (n. 67), ch. 14.

was the government of one man. The interventions of the people in affairs led on to monarchy.⁸²

To the urban proletariat this was no disadvantage. It was the aristocracy who suffered from loss of liberty. Tacitus says that Augustus won over the people with bread, and this was the greatest need.⁸³ They also benefited from improvements in the supply of water, from better fire-protection, better preservation of water, more splendid shows, more expenditure on buildings which gave employment. The emperors for their own security had to keep them content, and their misery was somewhat reduced. This was all they could expect in a world whose material resources remained small.

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⁸² Wirszubski (n. 59), pp. 47 ff. Cf. Sallust, *Jug. War*, 31: "sane fuerit regni paratio plebi sua restituere".

⁸³ *Ann.*, i. 5; cf. Augustus' *Res Gestae*, 5.